

Preface

It is our pleasure and privilege on behalf of the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) Bureau and the Central American and Mexico (CAM) Social Sector Component of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), to write the preface to the most comprehensive compilation of data regarding women's and children's health in the Central American Region. Recognizing the wealth of social sector data available from the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) and Reproductive Health Survey (RHS) programs, health and education office directors in the CAM region consisting of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua wanted to compare and contrast trends in key maternal and child health indicators in order to identify needs and potential synergies. The LAC Bureaus' Health Program joined the effort to help ensure that such information would aid the design and refinement of health programs and identify areas where these countries might work together more closely.

Great strides have been made in improving reproductive and child health in these countries during the last 10 years. In all of these countries, USAID has been the major donor in the health sector and can be proud of being a partner to these achievements. Still, disparities exist between rural and urban areas in all countries and between the income levels in each country. Often the reader will see similarities between achievements of El Salvador and Nicaragua compared to those of Guatemala and Honduras. Much is yet to be done in each country to achieve the health statistics of its neighboring country, Costa Rica, which has a similar culture and history, but overall better social and economic levels and health outcomes.

The RHS and DHS population-based survey programs have become the gold standard for health sector planners and decision makers in USAID Missions, as well as for host country governmental and non-governmental organizations and donor agencies such as UNFPA, PAHO, and UNICEF, the World Bank, and the Inter American Development Bank. This report provides insight on health behaviors, knowledge of HIV/AIDS, infant and child mortality and reproductive health. Regional trend data are easily available and usable for those seeking a regional approach to similar complex health problems, thus trying to maximize the impact of scarce health resources.

We wish to express our gratitude to the member countries and LAC that so generously helped with the resources and review of the report. Special thanks go to Dr. Mary Ann Anderson of USAID/Guatemala for her leadership in initiating this important work together with Kelly Saldaña of the USAID/LAC Health Team. Throughout the process, Dr. Paul Stupp, Dr. Steve McCracken and Mr. Richard Monteith of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as colleagues and professionals have been unwavering in their commitment to prepare a technically sound and helpful reference document for the development and improvement of women and children's health programs. To all of you, we appreciate your contributions.

Karen Welch
Health Team Leader
Office of Regional Sustainable Development
Latin America and Caribbean Bureau
USAID/W

Connie J. Johnson
Coordinator, CAM Social Sector Component
Health Office
USAID/El Salvador

